DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 276 255 FL 016 207

TITLE Resettlement Case Study: Non-Impacted Small Midwestern City.
INSTITUTION Center for Applied Linguistics, Washington, DC. Refugee Service Center.
PUB DATE Mar 86
NOTE 28p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Acculturation; *Adjustment (to Environment); Asian Americans; Case Studies; Diaries; Family Life; *Land Settlement; *Laotians; Personal Narratives; *Refugees; Urban Areas
IDENTIFIERS United States (Midwest)

ABSTRACT

The resettlement experiences of a Laotian family in a Midwestern agricultural community is studied. The characters and places are fictitious, but the story is based on actual experiences of refugee families resettling in areas without a heavy refugee influx. The information is drawn from interviews with refugees of several nationalities and with Americans knowledgeable about refugee resettlement. The story is told from the perspective of a 30-year-old Lao woman, beginning on the day her family decides to leave Laos and proceeding through the first two years in the United States. Characters include the Lao extended family of eight, another Laotian family, and two Americans. The narrative presents the woman's impressions, attitudes, and concerns, and describes general and specific experiences of acculturation and adjustment. Margin notes refer to discussion points made in notes at the end of the text. An evaluation form to be used by readers of the study is also included. (MSE)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

M. R
Tucker

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

RESETTLEMENT CASE STUDY • Number 2
March 1986

Resettlement Case Study reports are developed under an agreement with the U.S. Department of State, Bureau for Refugee Programs. However, the contents of this publication do not necessarily represent the policy of that agency, and readers should not assume the information provided is endorsed by the Federal Government.

The contents of this publication may be reproduced by any organization, public or private, engaged in furthering the education and assimilation of refugees bound for, or currently in, the United States.

Resettlement Case Study Survey

Position: ☐ Coordinator
☐ Supervisor
☐ Other (Please specify)_____

	Case Study #1 (Impacted Area)	Case Study #2 (Non-Impacted Area)
1 Was the resettlement information included:	☐ too much ☐ about right ☐ too little	☐ too much ☐ about right ☐ too little
2 Were the resettlement themes (issues):	☐ clear ☐ unclear	☐ clear ☐ unclear
3. Was the information included about the characters:	☐ too much ☐ about right ☐ too little	☐ too much ☐ about right ☐ too little
4. Was the style of presentation:	☐ hard to follow ☐ easy to follow	☐ hard to follow ☐ easy to follow

5. How would you use the information in the case studies?
   ☐ teacher training
   ☐ lesson planning/in-class use
   ☐ reading material for upper-level (E/E+) students
   ☐ other_____

6. If this were available in the native language, would it be useful for students?
   ☐ Yes ☐ No

   If yes, given the extra cost of multiple language production, how would you rate its importance?
   ☐ very important
   ☐ somewhat important
   ☐ limited importance

7 Was the language usage for teachers:	☐ appropriate ☐ inappropriate Why?	☐ appropriate ☐ inappropriate Why?
8. Was the level of English for E/E+ students:	☐ too high ☐ about right ☐ too low	☐ too high ☐ about right ☐ too low

(Survey continues on back)

9 What can we do to make the case studies more useful?

10. Are there any themes that you would like to see included in the case studies?

11 What did you enjoy about reading the case studies?

Case Study #1

Case Study #2

12 Additional comments:

CASE STUDY #2

NON-IMPACTED SMALL MIDWESTERN CITY

Prologue

The following story is about a Lao family, the Phothisalaths, who have resettled in the Midwestern agricultural community of Chester. The characters and place are fictitious, but the story itself is based on actual incidents that happened to refugee families resettling in non-impacted areas (those areas with a smaller refugee population) in Midwestern cities.

The information that is reported in this story was gathered from telephone interviews of many individuals knowledgeable about refugee resettlement in non-impacted areas of the Midwest. Both refugees (Vietnamese, Lao, and Khmer) and Americans were interviewed; they were representative of VOLAGS, MAAs, employment and adult education programs, public schools, and health and mental health services, as well as refugee families.

The fictitious city of Chester is a small Midwestern city surrounded by farmland. Chester has a population of 200,000. It has been accepting refugees since 1977 and has a refugee population of 2,000. Chester has one VOLAG office with one part-time employee. Like many non-impacted communities, Chester does not have a complex network of refugee social service providers. As a result, the local MAA serves as the primary link between refugees and the community. The community as a whole has welcomed refugees and has taken a special interest in their successful adjustment.

The story is told through the eyes of a 30-year-old Lao woman, Khamvene Phothisalath, who reflects on her family's resettlement experiences. Khamvene's story begins on the day her family decided to leave Laos. She then takes us through some of the significant events experienced by the Photisalath family during their first two years in the U.S.

The other characters you will meet include the following:

- **Bounma,** Khamvene's 35-year-old husband. Bounma was a sergeant in the Lao army before 1975. He was forced to flee his homeland with his family. He is hard-working and determined to succeed in the U.S.

- **Phetsamone (Phet)**, the 11-year-old daughter of Boumna and Khamvene. She is adjusting well to the U.S. and is receiving honors in school.

- **Grandpa**, Bounma's 55-year-old father. He is slowly adjusting to America but misses the "old days" in Laos.

- **Souksan (Souk)**, Khamvene's 33-year-old older brother. He is independent and proud, and experiences problems adapting to U.S. culture.

- **Malychanh (Maly)**, Souk's 30-year-old wife. She tries hard to hold her family together through their difficulties.

- **Bounthong and Saly**, the teenage sons of Souk and Maly. Their need to assert their independence has caused Souk anxiety.

- **The Phomsavanh family**, a large Lao family living in an apartment below Khamvene's. Souvanh Phomsavanh is an abrasive man who speaks frankly and harshly about life in the U.S.

- **Dorothy (Dottie) Neff**, a member of the church that sponsored the Photihsalaths. She works in close connection with the local VOLAG office and is responsible for helping the family during their entry into U.S. culture.

- **John Issac**, a 30-year-old American friend of Bounma and Khamvene.

At certain places throughout this case study, you will find the letters, D.P., in the right margin. These discussion points provide background information on important resettlement issues that may be used in class discussions. Refer to pages 19-23 for additional information related to the discussion points.

Khamvene's Story

Khamvene sat on the sofa in the living room staring out the window, watching the first snowfall of the season. The house was quiet: her husband, Bounma, had left for work, Grandpa was working at the church and her daughter, Phet, had gone to school. Her English class had been cancelled because of the snow, and she had several hours before she went to work. Watching the snow fall, Khamvene wondered how anything so beautiful could be so painfully cold. Her whole family disliked the cold weather -- it had forced them to buy a car before they could really afford it -- and it kept them indoors, sometimes for days on end.

It was two years since she and her family had come to this small city in the midwest. Had they made the right choice in leaving their homeland? Khamvene wondered. Life in America had been hard -- harder than any of them had expected. Everything moved so fast in this country. In her CO class in Phanat Nikhom, her teacher had taught her the expression, "Time is money." And so it was: It seemed there was never time to relax and enjoy life; more than anything, Khamvene missed the unhurried pace of life in Laos and the free time to enjoy the company of friends.

Mesmerized by the large white flakes falling gently on the small field behind their apartment building, Khamvene's mind wandered back to that day four years ago when they had decided to leave their country.

Flight

It was an evening in April, a few weeks before the beginning of the rains, when they made their decision. Her husband, Bounma, a sergeant in the old military regime, had returned two weeks before from four years in a re-education camp in northern Laos. Late one evening, after the rest of the village had gone to sleep, Bounma had called the family together to tell them of his plans for escape. After Bounma was through talking, the family turned to Grandpa, Bounma's

father and the head of the household, for his reaction. They knew he would agree; it was only a matter of form to ask him.

After Grandpa gave his consent, he withdrew to his room. There before the Buddhist altar he asked Lord Buddha for a safe journey.

They waited for the right time -- a foggy, rainy morning two weeks later. The fog provided cover, and guards would be less likely to be at their posts in the rain. An hour before dawn, the nine members of the family stepped into a boat concealed by trees in a cove on the Mekong river. Bounma paid the boatman, and within minutes they were on their way to Thailand. They landed on the other side just as dawn broke, and as Khamvene stepped out of the boat, holding her sleeping daughter, she looked back over the river and thought: "This is the last time I will see my country."

Arrival

It was a muggy day in August when Khamvene and her family boarded a plane in Bangkok's Don Muang airport for their flight to the U.S. It seemed unbelievable to her that after two years in Thailand, after a year and a half of waiting in Na Pho refugee camp in northern Thailand and six months of English language and CO training in Phanat Nikhom, they were finally on their way. They had been waiting for this moment for two years, but when it came, excitement gave way to concern. What was going to happen to them? Khamvene wondered. They had no relatives to help them in the U.S., they were, as an official in the refugee camp had explained, "free cases." "Free cases" are more often placed in towns and cities where there is a smaller refugee population, the official pointed out, because they receive special attention from employers, churches, and service providers who treat the refugees like family.

D.P.#1
Many "free cases" enjoy the benefits of non-impacted areas...See p.19

Khamvene and her family were being sponsored by a church in Chester, a Midwestern agricultural community of about 200,000 people, the official said. Chester had over 2,000 refugees, many of them from Laos. This last piece of information cheered Khamvene, but still she wondered: Was Bounma's English good enough for him to find a job? How would Phet do in school? Could they adjust to the climate? Would they be able to buy Lao food?

The trip to Chester did not lessen her fears. In Seattle, there was someone to help them change planes, but when they arrived in Chicago, no one was waiting for them. Bounma left the family in a corner of the airport lounge, and tried to find help. His English, although good in the camp, did not serve him well in this crisis: no one could understand him. Finally he found an airport official who took the time to explain in simplified English that they had missed their flight to Chester and that the next flight would be in 12 hours. The family spent the night at the airport, sleeping on chairs in the lounge in front of their departure gate.

In Chester, the family was met by a woman from the church that had sponsored them. A Lao aide from a refugee organization accompanied her. Bounma stuck his hand out to shake hands with the woman, just as he had been taught to do in his CO class at Phanat Nikhom, but at the same the woman raised her hands and placed them together in a *wai,* the traditional Lao greeting. As Bounma quickly withdrew his hand to return the Lao greeting, the woman put her hand out to shake his. Everyone laughed -- the tension of the meeting was broken.

With the Lao aide translating, the woman introduced herself. "I am Dorothy Neff," she said. "But everybody calls me Dottie." Khamvene summoned her courage and delivered the sentence she had been practicing for this moment: "I am pleased to meet you, Mrs. Dottie," she said. "You speak English very well," said Dottie, putting an arm around Khamvene's shoulder. Khamvene felt drawn to this friendly woman, but at

the same time she felt slightly uncomfortable with this public display of affection.

Dottie had brought warm clothes for the family, and gave each of them a coat, hat, gloves, and boots. Khamvene smiled to see Phet in a hat that almost covered her eyes, and she laughed out loud to see Bounma lost in a coat that was twice his size.

Dottie then drove the family to the apartment house which was to be their new home. Along the way, they passed a Lao temple; the presence of the temple surprised and pleased Khamvene. The temple was walking distance from their apartment, so even Grandpa would be able to visit it daily.

Khamvene was happy to hear that several Lao families lived in the area and that two families lived in the same apartment building. The Lao aide told her that sponsors carefully chose the neighborhoods where refugees would live. Neighbors were interviewed beforehand to make sure that the refugees would be welcomed into the neighborhood. The Lao aide explained that there had been trouble in the past and now refugees were not given housing in certain neighborhoods. He also said sponsors looked for housing near the MAA center and Buddhist temple since public transportation in this town was not very good. He explained that the buses only ran at certain hours and didn't go near some neighborhoods. He also said, in his opinion, the family should start thinking about saving for a car.

The sponsor showed the family two apartments -- one would house Khamvene's family and Bounma's father; the other was to be the home of her brother and his wife and three children. The Lao translator explained that the church had paid the security deposit and one month's rent, and that the furniture in the house was theirs: the church who sponsored them had donated everything -- even the sheets and towels. The apartment had two bedrooms. Fresh flowers sat on a wooden table in the kichen which was equipped with more appliances than Khamvene had seen in the model house in the

camp. A fifty-pound bag of sticky rice sat next to the stove. A cross hung on the wall of the living room.

Dottie took the family on a tour of their new apartment. Through the translator, Dottie explained how to use the appliances in the apartment and what was expected of them as tenants. She showed the family where to put garbage and cautioned them not to put rice down the sink drain because there was no garbage disposal. She showed them how to defrost the refrigerator and emphasized that it should be done when frost builds up. She showed them how to light the gas stove and told them what to do if the pilot light went out.

After the tour, Dottie and the family sat down in the living room, and, over soft drinks, Dottie explained how her church would help them. She explained that different sponsors handle the resettlement money in different ways. Rather than give the money to the refugees, her church preferred to pay their initial expenses for them, she said. The church would pay the security deposit on their apartment, and take care of rent and food for two months. She mentioned that one of the members of the church owned a department store and that he outfitted all refugee families in clothes when they first arrived. "Actually with this arrangement you'll get more goods and benefits than if we just gave you the resettlement money," Dottie said. In addition, the church had placed a small amount of money in a checking account for them, so that they would have spending money.

D.P.#2 Volags provide core services on a temporary basis...See p.19

D.P.#3 The provision of core services varies...See p.19

"The church will help you get started," Dottie said. "Many people have donated money, goods, and time to help you. People expect that you'll be able to take care of yourself soon."

She told them to call her if they had any problems in the apartment. Dottie and the translator left the family to rest and unpack. They said they would be back tomorrow to take them to the hospital for medical check-ups and to various stores to buy necessities.

Khamvene unpacked thinking about her first impressions of America. Driving from the airport to Chester, they had passed through farmland -- big white houses surrounded by acres of open land. How different this was from Laos, where people lived in houses arranged in tight clusters. The Lao aide pointed to the fields, and said that the tall yellow grass was wheat, and that soon it would be time to harvest it. Khamvene thought about her small village in southern Laos; the rains would soon be over, and it would be time to harvest the rice.

Soon they had left the open countryside. Now the houses were smaller and sat side by side on uniformly square plots of land. Next to each house was a small road leading to a smaller building. It was for the cars, the aid explained. Even the cars in this country had houses, Khamvene thought. The houses were beautiful, and Khamvene wondered if someday she and her family would own one. But why were the streets so empty? Where were all the people?

They entered a different part of town. The buildings were tall and the streets were busy with traffic. Khamvene had been told that Chester was a small city, but it looked a lot bigger to her than Vientiane, the capital of Laos.

Khamvene finished unpacking, and went downstairs to visit her brother in his apartment. Souk was sitting on a chair in the living room, staring out the window. It struck Khamvene how sad he looked. Her sister-in-law, Maly, looked concerned. "Is he all right?" Khamvene asked. Maly said he was -- he was just tired. The long trip had taken its toll on all of them.

Orientation

A few days later, Dottie took Bounma, Khamvene, Souk, and Maly to the refugee organization and the job placement agency. The refugee organization, they were told by a Lao worker, was an MAA -- a mutual assistance association. The MAA had received some monies from the government to help refugees, and most of the workers were refugees themselves.

One of the purposes of the MAA was to provide refugees with an orientation to the community, the Lao worker said. Later that afternoon, he would take them on a tour of Chester and show them the Oriental food stores, the elementary school where Phet would be studying, the bus system, and the community college where Bounma, Khamvene, Souk, and Maly could study English.

The MAA also helped refugees in other ways. If they needed someone to translate for them at the health clinic or at their children's school or if they had a problem with their landlord, sponsor, or the police, the MAA would help them.

The MAA also provided financial help. A system of interest-free loans, made possible by donations from churches, resettled refugees, and other people in the community, had been set up. The MAA worker explained that if they needed money for a bus pass now or for a down payment on a car later, the family could apply for a loan from the MAA. The worker also explained that a food bank, run by the church, was available to them. Once a month volunteers from the MAA would pick up the food, and take it back to their center for refugee families who needed it. There was no charge for the food.

D.P.#4 Services provided by MAA's vary... See p.20

Job training and adult education classes were also available at the MAA center. ESL and math classes were offered regularly, and special classes, such as how to fill out an income tax form, were offered. The MAA ran two vocational training programs: Machine Training and Secondary Wage Earner Training. The second program was to help refugees not normally in the workforce: the elderly, mothers with small children, and teenagers.

D.P.#5 Multiple incomes is the norm for American families...See p.20

After the basic orientation, the family sat down with the MAA leader to talk about public assistance. He emphasized that the family could make more money by combining salaries than by taking welfare, and that the self-respect and independence gained by working was valuable. He told them that if they went on public assistance, the government would

monitor their affairs. He also emphasized an important point: Chester was a small Midwestern agricultural community whose citizens valued hard work and self-reliance. The community would generously help support the refugees but only if they would help themselves.

D.P.#6 Becoming self-reliant is a strong expectation... See p.21

"Taking public assistance and not working will hurt our image," he said. "We've worked hard to build a good reputation. We want the community to be glad we're here, and we want them to continue to sponsor refugees." He also emphasized that because Chester was a relatively small city, the refugee community tried to keep a low profile, solving their problems internally. He asked Bounma to contact him first if Bounma's family had any problems. "We're like a Lao family here," he said. "We like to keep our problems in the family."

Dottie then accompanied the family to the job placement agency. First, Bounma, Souk, Khamvene and Maly took an English test. Then, the Lao job counselor explained that his task was not only to help place refugees in jobs, but also to serve as a link between employer and refugee employee. He would help with any problems that might arise and would assist each of them in understanding what was expected of them. "Employers in this area like to hire refugees because they are hard-working, reliable, and frequently will take jobs Americans would not take," he said.

D.P.#7 Equal employment opportunities apply to all... See p.21

"In fact," he added, laughing, "There's one employer who hired so many refugees to work in his factory that he was sued for not giving equal opportunity to others." He told them that if the family wanted to work, there were jobs.

The job developer emphasized that taking English classes or vocational training now would not ensure them higher-paying jobs later. He recommended that they take jobs now and take ESL classes or vocational training while working. "Now is a good time to work", he stressed. "You are enthusiastic, motivated, and fresh and should put those qualities to work." He spoke of refugees who lost their drive and were disappointed that they couldn't find better jobs after their study. "The language and skills you will learn from taking

D.P.#8 Study first, enter job market at higher level later vs. take any job now, study as you go...See pg.21

classes while you work can be applied to your own work situation," he said, "And working will give you a chance to practice the English you learn in class."

After she returned home, Khamvene read the monthly Lao newsletter that the MAA leader had given her. The lead article focused on the number of refugee families who had left Chester to move to California. It stated that several families had returned to Chester, disappointed at what they found in California. The article interviewed one family who reported, "We miss the kindness of the people in Chester. In California it is hard to find work, and people aren't as friendly." The article cautioned refugee families to consider the expense of moving, the working time that would be lost, the fact that California is reforming its public assistance laws making them less liberal, and that the entry-level job market in California is glutted with refugees and immigrants. Khamvene reflected on the article. She thought it would be nice to live in warm weather again, but wondered if the people in California could be as generous as those she was meeting here.

A Visit

That evening Khamvene and Bounma visited the Phomsavanh family, a Lao family living in a apartment nearby. They were a large Lao family who had come to the U.S. in 1979. Entering their apartment, Khamvene was startled to see so many people living there. There were several mattresses on the living room floor; the place was crowded and messy. In Laos it was common for many people to live under one roof, but the home would have a feeling of harmony. Here it was different; here she felt chaos. She noticed how family members kept bickering with one another.

Souvanh Phomsavanh was a loud, aggressive man who looked much older than his 45 years. His manner was rough and abrasive, and Khamvene wondered if he had had to bury his Lao character to be able to survive in this country. Khamvene was not taken with him -- his attitude seemed arrogant. She

wondered if Americans liked him, and if those who met him thought all Lao acted this way.

Souvanh talked about the experiences he had had over the last six years in the United States. He talked about his last apartment and about the dishonest landlord who wouldn't give him his deposit back when he was asked to leave the apartment his family of 10 had lived in. He spoke of the number of times the landlord complained about the smell of frying fish, about housing too many people, and about the time someone in his family clogged the plumbing and made water overflow into the apartment below. He talked about the time his gas and water were cut off. He had sent his utilities check in on the day it was due. It had arrived two days late, and the landlord wouldn't help him. In fact, the gas and electric company had charged him $50 to hook the utilities back up again.

D.P.#9 Living in a rented house or apartment usually involves a number of pre-determined agreements... See p.22

"I was glad to leave that neighborhood anyway," he said. "A lot of poor people lived there. Most of them came from places I'd never heard of." Some of the children in the neighborhood had thrown rocks at his apartment and bullied his children, he said. Once he lost his temper and got in a fist fight with one of the neighbors whose son had been bothering his children. He also was angry because his sponsor had withheld his resettlement money when he first arrived, and had discouraged Souvanh from going on public assistance. "They owe me that money," he said, angrily. "If it wasn't for America, I wouldn't be a refugee."

D.P.#10 American feelings of responsibility toward refugees also carries expectations of them...See p.22

Khamvene and Bounma returned to their apartment, feeling depressed. Was America such an unfriendly, difficult place? Khamvene couldn't help but feel that Souvanh had brought a lot of the problem on himself. Khamvene bowed before the Buddhist altar she had set up earlier in the day and prayed that Buddha would bless her family and bring them good luck in the future. She glanced at the cross that hung on the wall: maybe this American God could help them, too.

Working

Over the next weeks the family made a lot of important decisions. They decided that all adult family members would work as soon as possible, and by combining salaries they could make more than what they would receive from public assistance. Bounma laid out their financial situation for Khamvene. He showed her that a family of four would receive $400 in public assistance and $250 in food stamps. With the two of them working full-time, and with Grandpa joining the MAA Secondary Wage Earner Program, the combined monthly income would be over $1000.

Bounma took a job at a cup-making factory in town for $4.25 an hour, and Khamvene took a job sewing clothes in another factory for $3.80 an hour. They decided to work different shifts so that someone would always be home with Phet, since Grandpa was also working. He went to the church three times a week to sort screws in a church-sponsored program for the elderly. A local factory sent pounds of screws to the church, and elderly refugees were given the job of sorting the good screws from the bad. The pay was $3.50 an hour, and the church supplied transportation. Grandpa had been feeling more depressed as time went on, and taking the job helped renew his feeling of worth. Not only was he contributing to the family income, but he was treated with respect by the church people -- a treatment he was receiving less and less from his own family members, who no longer turned to him for advice and guidance. It was also good for him to be with other elderly refugees to share experiences and talk about the old days in Laos.

D.P.#11 Work for the elderly may be harder to find, but worth the effort...See p.22

Souk has Problems

Only one family member refused to work -- Souk. Souk insisted that he needed more training, that he was not ready to work yet, and so enrolled in an auto mechanic vocational training program at the community college. There was a Lao translator in the class, which was unusual for vocational

training at this school. In order to support himself and his family Souk applied for public assistance. Although the vocational training program was good, it bothered Souk that he only had access to a job that required manual labor. In Laos he had been a clerk, a position that carried status. Khamvene tried to convince Souk that he needed to study English -- that this was his only hope for advancement, but Souk resisted, feeling pushed by his sister. Rather than taking advantage of the free English classes offered at the community college, Souk began hanging out with Lao friends, drinking and gambling the night away. He was home less, and the small amount of money he received from public assistance was being wasted. Problems between Souk and Maly arose.

D.P.#12 Stress sometimes leads to domestic violence which is against the law...See p.22

One night Bounma awoke to a ruckus going on downstairs in his brother-in-law's apartment. There was the sound of glass breaking and furniture being turned over. Bounma rushed downstairs and found Maly sitting limp on the couch, a large red mark beginning to swell on her face. Bounma was saddened. Certainly husbands had the right to discipline their wives if they got out of hand, but Maly had been so dutiful, so attentive all these years. Bounma sent the children to their rooms and comforted a crying Maly as Souk abruptly left the house.

Through her sobs, Maly explained that she and Souk had fought over money. Souk had borrowed money from friends to buy many new items -- a stereo, a radio, a TV -- and now wanted to buy a used car. Maly, as the money manager, had explained to Souk that this would require monthly payments, and they were barely making it on the money they had now -- especially since Souk lost so much gambling. Maly accused Souk of not planning for the family's future, a fight broke out, and now Souk was gone again.

The months that followed the first fight between Souk and Maly were, on the whole, happy months for Khamvene and Bounma. Bounma was being trained to become a supervisor in the factory which meant he would get a raise, and Khamvene was making many Lao and American friends at work. Both

studied English at night, and practiced speaking it whenever they had a chance. Together they dreamed of opening an Oriental grocery after their English was good enough and they had some money saved. Their daughter, Phet, who was in fifth grade, was doing well in school and next year would leave special ESL classes and go into regular classes.

Life seemed to be improving for Souk and Maly, too. In order to pay off some of his debts, Souk had decided to take a job, and Maly found a job as a housecleaner in a hotel. He also insisted that his sons Bounthong and Saly take jobs after school to contribute to the family income.

Souk finished his vocational training and with the help of a counselor found a job as an apprentice auto mechanic. He was happy that the vocational training had paid off; most students in the class had not been able to get jobs as auto mechanics. His sons joined the Second Wage Earner program at the MAA. They worked part-time after school; their job involved weaving rugs from strips of cloth from clothing donated by Goodwill. The combined wages of the family were now twice what they had received with public assistance, and both Maly and Souk received benefits. Debts were being paid, and Souk actually started to come out of his depression.

Then one night Maly came to the door in tears. The family was in trouble. She explained to Bounma and Khamvene that Souk had come home drunk two nights before. He had quit his job and had gone to a friend's house to drink. He was raving that some American had stolen his tools at work, and rather than report the tools missing, he said he had replaced the tools with his own money, which had cost him $300. He was so upset that he left the job swearing never to go back. In his drunken state, he told Maly that some of the Americans at work had been giving him a hard time, teasing him because he didn't understand English. Once Souk told Maly that one of the men accused him of borrowing his tools and Souk chose not to respond. The man was yelling at him, but Souk only stared at the ground, trying to control his anger. The man shoved him; Souk continued to stare at the ground. Other Americans

D.P.#13 On-the-job tensions are not comon, but sometimes occur...See p.23

began to tease him. Souk lost his temper and kicked one of the men in the chest with the side of his foot, and the man dropped to the ground. The supervisor arrived at this point, and both men were taken to the supervisor's office. A representative from the MAA was called to translate and mediate. Both men were put on probation, and both returned to work, but Souk never forgave the American. He had socialized mostly with Lao workers during work breaks before, but now he vowed never to associate with Americans at work again.

Souk was very upset when he came home. Weeks of anger against his co-workers and anger at his supervisor for not punishing the American came spilling out. He had talked with his friends, who thought he had lost face, and now that his tools were gone, along with his $300, life became unbearable. After he angrily told Maly what had happened, he began picking on his youngest son, Bounthong, and his anger that he was losing control over his children spilled out, too. He started arguing with his son about how he dressed, how he spent his time, how he acted. Bounthong's disobedient manner was unacceptable. Souk was head of his family, and he resented either his wife or his children contradicting him. In his view, even though they all contributed to the family income, they did not have a right to make decisions. The children disagreed and argued with him. And sometimes Maly defended the children. He had had enough; his family needed discipline. He took a strap to Bounthong's back.

The next day a representative from the MAA called Maly to tell her that her son, Bounthong, would not be coming home that night. The MAA had been notified that Bounthong was in the custody of the juvenile court and that the court would be temporarily placing him with foster parents. Bounthong's physical education teacher had noticed the large welts on Bounthong's back, and since this was not the first time he had seen these, he had decided to take action.

Lao New Year

April brought the Lao New Year. Khamvene was not in a festive mood, nor were any of her family, but all attended the celebration. The family invited an American friend, John Issac, to accompany them. John had helped them during their settling in period, and had become close friends with the family. John had picked up some Lao, and the evenings that John spent with the family were full of laughter as each practiced speaking his or her own new language. In addition, John was helping Phet twice a week with her studies.

The New Years festival that year had a good turnout. The celebration began with a *baci* at the *wat* . Most of the Lao community was there, and many of them had brought American friends. Outside the temple in the small compound, children played *katew*, a game played with a rattan ball and a volleyball net, while inside, the adults gathered for the *baci* ceremony. At the *baci*, Khamvene sat next to John Isaac. She took a string from the silver bowl centerpiece and swept the string across his wrist three times, saying: "Everything bad come out; everything good come in." As she tied the string around his wrist, she wished him good luck, -- and a beautiful Lao wife. The ceremony ended with the monk sprinkling perfumed water on everyone.

Later that evening there was a dance at the community center. The evening began with traditional Lao dancing. Khamvene, dressed in a handwoven silk dress that she had brought with her from Laos, smiled as she watched Phet perform one of the traditional Lao dances on the stage built for the occasion. Phet, too, was dressed in finery, and wore bright pink make-up and flowers in her hair. Khamvene felt proud of her -- Phet had always shown an interest in Lao culture. She took interest in cooking Lao food, she had joined the Lao dance troop, and she was learning to sing traditional Lao songs. Khamvene felt blessed to have a daughter like Phet; so many Lao children tried to hide their culture in an attempt to become like Americans. The adoption of American ways was often the cause of fights between Lao parents and their children. Children wanted to go to the movies, drive

around town, or attend dances at school without their parents. They wanted to wear jeans and clothes that looked old and unkept -- clothes that only a worker in the rice fields would wear. Khamvene felt secure that as Phet got older, she would not cause the family great difficulty.

Lao Community Support

Three weeks after the New Year's party, the MAA Refugee Services Consortium committee held a meeting. The committee was made up of local refugee leaders and met once a month. Sometimes the MAA invited representatives from community agencies -- such as the police department, the schools, and the hospitals -- to talk to refugees about their services. But this meeting had been called to discuss two problems: the desecration of the *wat* and Bounthong's placement in a foster home.

The room was full. Khamvene felt both embarrassment and hope -- embarrassment that her family problems were going to be discussed publicly and hope that a solution would be found. Last month she and Maly had gone to the *wat* and told the monk about Bounthong. The monk had said he would pray for Bounthong's return. Khamvene and Maly had vowed to bring flowers to the *wat* if Bounthong were reunited with his family.

The meeting began with a discussion of the problems at the *wat*. Several months ago someone had thrown red paint on the walls of the temple; more recently, American men had been driving by shouting obsenities and throwing rocks and beer cans. Khamvene felt sad to hear this. She could not understand who would do this kind of thing: everyone she had met in this community had been so kind and generous. Where was this animosity coming from?

The MAA leader explained that there were some people in this town who were afraid of minorities, of people who looked different. But, he continued, these people were few in

number. In fact, the MAA leader reported, several churches had raised money to repaint the temple and replace the broken windows, and a representative from the city government was going on television to tell the community that the temple was a house of worship and that the men in orange robes were men of God. Khamvene wondered if those who caused the damage thought that the temple was a martial arts center and a training ground for terrorists. She had heard others say that this may be the source of the fear.

Khamvene's heart began to pound. The next topic for discussion was Bounthong. Both Maly and Souk were staring at the floor. Khamvene felt sorry for Souk. He had grown thin and pale over these past weeks, and Maly said he barely spoke and never left the house. Souk had lost face: the entire refugee community was aware that his son had been taken from him. She was glad that Grandpa was home with the children; this whole affair had bothered him. He was not speaking with Souk, even though Khamvene had tried to bring the two together.

The MAA leader began by briefly describing what happened. He continued by saying that the whole family was deeply concerned and that Souk in particular was suffering greatly. He explained that he deeply loved the boy, that he felt sorry and ashamed, and that he wanted the boy back. He said that Souk was willing to attend monthly family counselling meetings.

Someone from the group suggested that representatives from the MAA, along with Souk and Maly, go talk to the court, to the school -- to whomever they needed to to plead their case. And if no one would listen the first time, different representatives would go a second time and maybe a third until the authorities could be made to believe that Souk was a good man -- one who had some difficulty but who vowed to improve. Everyone felt the idea was worth a try. After all, one man pointed out, many of the MAA leaders were on good terms with the authorities, who had proven to be reasonable people.

One afternoon three days later, Khamvene and Maly were sitting on the front steps of their apartment building enjoying the warm spring air, when a car pulled up with Bounthong in the back. Three others got out of the car with him -- an American couple, probably the foster parents, and a volunteer Khamvene recognized from the MAA. Bounthong was home. Tomorrow she and Maly would bring flowers to the temple.

****

It was still snowing when the phone rang, breaking Khamvene's reverie. It was Phet. She had just received an award at school for "most improved student in her class." The students in the assembly had cheered her as she walked forward to receive her award from the principal. She couldn't wait until the end of the day to tell her mother; she had to call.

Khamvene hung up. She thought how proud Bounma would be of Phet. Education had always been important to him, and he would be pleased by her achievement. Khamvene decided she couldn't wait until the end of the day, either. She went to the phone to call Bounma.

DISCUSSION POINTS

DP #1

Free cases is the term used in resettlement to refer to refugees who are eligible for admission into the U.S. but do not have family members living there. The majority of refugees come to the U.S. for family reunification and they generally choose to resettle close to their relatives. VOLAGS sponsoring refugees who come as *free cases* usually encourage them to locate in less-impacted areas. As is the case with all refugees, *free cases* may move to another location if they so choose. (This is called secondary migration.) Upon moving to impacted areas--where there is a larger refugee population--many secondary migrants find that they prefer the advantages of living in non-impacted communities.

DP #2

Voluntary Agencies (VOLAGS) enter into a Cooperative Agreement with the Department of State to provide core services to assist refugees during their first 90 days in the U.S. Included in these core services is the provision of the first month's rent, food and essential clothing and furniture, an orientation to the community and its resources, introduction to employment services, enrollment of children in school, and referral for health problems. There are informal follow-up services for a period of 90 days. After this time it can be assumed that most refugees will be receiving services in agencies other than through their VOLAG. VOLAGS are in a helping role, and in most cases provide services over and above those paid for in the State Department agreement.

DP #3

Just as refugees have expectations of their VOLAGS and sponsors, sponsors also have expectations of the refugees. Sometimes they are clearly spelled out and both the refugee and sponsor know what to expect of the other. More often the *contract* is not very clear. There are probably as many variations in sponsor/refugee *contracts* as there are refugees and sponsors. Some sponsors choose to provide the necessary short-term financial support themselves; others help the refugees apply for welfare and other public services for which they are eligible. Sponsors who are financially responsible may have expectations for earlier self-sufficiency

than otherwise might be the case. In order to avoid misunderstanding, it is important for refugees to understand that services and expectations among sponsors will vary. Insofar as possible, refugees should try to clarify what these are.

DP #4

Services offered by Mutual Assistance Associations (MAAs) run the gamit. Some MAAs operate on a volunteer basis; others receive funding either directly through the Office of Refugee Resettlement or as sub-contractors to larger organizations. Services include resettlement assistance such as translation, transportation, job placement; cultural and spiritual leadership; economic development, such as assistance for access to low-interest loans and technical expertise to establish refugee-owned businesses. Other MAA activities may include special interest groups such as, women's groups, senior citizen associations, professional societies, alumni associations, and advocacy groups for political action on a variety of issues from liberation of the home country to campaigning for U.S. elections. *Not all of these services are provided by all MAAs.*

Virtually all communities, even those with a small refugee population, have an MAA. Refugees should be encouraged to find out more about the MAAs in their community when they arrive in the U.S.

DP #5

Secondary-Wage Earners are those family members who may not typically be employed outside the home. Included in this group are mothers of small children, the elderly, and teenagers. Research on the economic status of refugees indicates that the single most important factor in moving from low- to middle-income status and becoming self-sufficient is multiple incomes from family members.

The majority of American families have at least two incomes (husband and wife). American teenagers often work to earn their own spending money and to save for college. Multiple incomes are a way of life in America.

DP #6

The concept of self-reliance is an underlying American value which strongly influences expectation about the refugee's behavior in the U.S. The expectation that assistance is temporary and intended to help the refugee become self-supporting is fundamental to the giving. These expectations may be more pronounced in rural and Midwestern communities. Americans are basically very generous people who sincerely want and enjoy giving to help those in need. Their generosity, however, is often proportionate to the recipients' efforts to help themselves.

DP #7

Equal Employment Opportunity is a Federal law which prohibits discrimination in hiring, promotion, lay off, pay, fringe benefits, and other aspects of employment on the basis of race, color, religion, sex or national origin. The major barrier to employment for refugees in the US is limited English proficiency. The example given in this case study is typical of *many* employers who hire refugees and find them to be exceptionally good and dependable workers. The term "reverse discrimination" is used when an employer favors a particular minority group to the exclusion of other candidates.

DP #8

There is considerable discussion among service providers about the most advantageous time for refugees to begin work after their arrival in the U.S. The official government position is that adult refugees should accept employment and become self-sufficient as quickly as possible. Since the Federal government is the principal funding source for most refugee programs, the policy of early self-sufficiency is a mandate that is imposed on all agencies and programs receiving government assistance. However, there is wide variance among service providers' interpretation of "as quickly as possible." Even within the same national agency, representatives in one city may actually assist their clients in filling out welfare applications while their sister agency in another city may have a firm policy of immediate employment for all employable adults, referring only the rarest of cases for cash assistance.

The proponants of study first, work later believe that with additional classroom instruction in the U.S., individuals will have more self-

confidence and better English skills when they enter the job market. Those who encourage immediate employment are equally strong in their belief in the benefits of work now, study as you go. To date there has been no economic data that demonstrates any difference in starting salaries of one group over the other. Virtually all refugees enter the labor market in entry level jobs earning entry level salaries.

DP #9

The landlord's complaints are examples of issues that are regulated by housing codes. All cities have adopted housing codes that are intended to protect both the landlord and the tenant. These codes vary by jurisdiction, but most of them include rules that pertain to sanitation standards, occupancy rates, and specific landlord and tenant responsibilities. Often, landlords will overlook housing code violations (such as overcrowding,) if tenants pay their rent promptly, take care of the property, and do not cause a disturbance.

DP #I0

Most Americans feel responsible to provide temporary assistance to refugees when they arrive in the U.S. Some Southeast Asian refugees may consider government assistance to be a gift with no strings attached, as may be the case in their own countries. However, in America, there *are* expectations when assistance is given. It is expected that refugees will use their time while they receive public support to do everything possible to make themselves self-supporting as soon as possible.

DP #1I

Unfortunately, there are only a small number of employment programs specifically for elderly refugees in the U.S. However, if a person under the age of 65 *wants* to work, there are jobs available. It may mean that older refugees must start in lower level positions than they held in their own country, but self-esteem and endurance are often the rewards for those who make the necessary adjustment.

DP #12

The incidence of domestic violence among refugees has been reported throughout the U.S. In most cases, it is reported, by a neighbor or sponsor,

not by the abused spouse. Some forms of punishment by a husband toward his wife that are acceptable in the refugee's native country are against the law in the U.S.

All refugees will experience stress when they come to the U.S. Almost all refugees experience financial pressure and a sense of isolation that accompanies the loss of their traditional support system--the family and local community. The overseas training program can prepare refugees to anticipate and cope with the stress of adjustment by helping refugees identify the substitute support systems that exist in the U.S. to help refugees with their problems. Included in these support systems are VOLAGs, sponsors, MAAs, community mental health programs, and religious leaders. Refugees should be encouraged to discover and use the support services available to them in their communities in the U.S.

DP #13

It should be noted that most refugees do not experience racial conflicts on their jobs and that both American employers and co-workers are happy to have them in the workforce. However, there have been some reports of racially provoked incidences on the job. Some possible explanations for this racial tension may be the perception that, in some cases, refugees are favored over Americans for certain jobs; that refugees are willing to take jobs that Americans won't accept which makes Americans look bad; that refugees will work longer hours for less pay and are more productive than Americans. Sometimes refugees do not understand the spoken and unspoken rules for behavior at a worksite and will violate them without realizing the ramifications of their acts. Job counselors, MAAs and VOLAGS can be helpful in advising refugees about employment and on-the-job practices specific to a given area.